



## **Case Study Strand A: Research Culture and Community: University of Suffolk**

Contact: [courage.pgroffice@uea.ac.uk](mailto:courage.pgroffice@uea.ac.uk)

### **Setting the scene**

Strand A of the Courage Project focused on research culture and community across each of the four faculties at UEA, across the Norwich Bioscience Institutes and at the University of Suffolk. A PGR (or multiple PGRs) was employed as paid placement holders through the project to understand and address research culture and community in their respective faculties. The projects were PGR-led and responsive to the specific needs of PGRs within each of the respective general discipline areas.

This was a part-time paid placement from January 2019 until January 2020 (hours were equivalent to 3 months full-time). The placement was PGR-led and responsive to the specific needs and demands of the research community at the University of Suffolk.

Since establishing in early 2011 PGR students' numbers have grown and continue to grow within University of Suffolk. Large numbers of the students at UoS are part time and have a high number of other commitments and on top of that there were no PGR reps in place until September 2018, as a result there has been little to no development of a research culture or community within PGR students at UoS and PGR wellbeing was not individual thought about. This project allowed the development of a research culture and community within UoS PGR students by using several activities, workshops and support sessions as well as allowed for there to be a recognition and increase in support for PGR wellbeing.

### **Action Taken**

Many activities were put on for the PGRs by the PGR placement throughout the time the placement was in post, and various feedback on these activities ensured that the placement was responsive and improvements were made throughout and can be made in the future to ensure that it is best facilitating a research culture and community for PGR students with the various demographics that UoS students possess.

A summary of some the activities that were arranged to develop research culture and community within the University of Suffolk PGR community is provided.

- **PhD Mentor Scheme**
  - A drop-in session for PGR students to talk to a mentor about their PGR studies, to discuss challenges with someone who is not their supervisor or directly part of the university PGR staff.

- **PhD Breakfast Club**
  - A drop in session for PGRs and supervisors to talk to each other in a relaxed environment, before the 'working day' began, with fruit and pastries provided.
- **Week to Write**
  - A week designated to writing. A room was booked for a week for PGRs to come for some or all of the time to spend some time writing or doing other PhD work with other PGRs. A relaxed environment, without a set structure but often the group with take breaks and have lunch together.
- **PGR Wellbeing and PGR Experience Event**
  - Included a number of Focus Groups looking at the PGR provision at UoS Generally as well as the Courage Project Placement Provision and Opinions on Culture and Community at the university. It also included a session with HR where students were encouraged to give their opinion on the current PGR HR training and workshop provision as well as what they would like to see in the future.
- **UEA 'Away Day'**
  - Transport was arranged for a group of PGRs to visit UEA and attend a series of training workshops. This included developing as a writer and having conversations about mental health.
- **PGR Seminar Series**
  - An interdisciplinary PGR seminar series for new and current PGRs to present their ongoing research and to gain feedback from a supportive audience of peers. The seminars are held on a monthly basis.

## **Key Impact and Outcomes**

Alongside the PGR research culture and community events that were arranged, having the PGR placement holder as part of the Courage project developed better support links within the University of Suffolk, including Student Support, HR, Health, Safety and Wellbeing and the Students' Union. Moreover, collaboration occurred across University of Suffolk and University of East Anglia through the Students' Union and Student Support Services. Resources were created by the PGR placement holder to identify sources of Wellbeing and Support Services for University of Suffolk PGRs.

It is a key recommendation that the University of Suffolk Graduate School continue to have a PGR student in a post which mimics the Courage Placement post, known as PGR Student Liaison Office. Over the last year, by having a student in place to focus on UoS research culture and community as well as PGR wellbeing, the PGR provision has improved, activities put on have improved the PGR experience, culture and community, and PGR wellbeing has become a key focus. It would be a severe loss to the PGR student community at UoS if they were to lose someone who is dedicated to developing the above and ensuring that student wellbeing is at the heart of and embedded in all the universities processes and plans. This post would work alongside the PGR Reps as well as the SU at the University of Suffolk as well as the University of East Anglia to ensure continuity and further development for PGR's.